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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE NATURE AND SOURCES OF TEMPTATION.

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”—James i. 13, 14.

It is very seldom that the sacred writers make philosophical analyses. It is seldom that they deal in psychological questions. Ordinarily they state things as they appear to common people, and as they are described in the language of common life. Now and then, however, there is a statement of remarkable breadth and accuracy, even in a philosophical point of view. For example, no better definition of *faith* has been given than that which is given by the writer of the Hebrews :

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

In the text, temptation is very subtly discriminated, and wrong conceptions are thrown out. It is not very often, in our time, that men think they are tempted of God ; but in the ancient days the gods were supposed to incline men to evil, in order that they might snare and punish them. There was an impression that men were tempted of God directly ; and the apostle James declares that in this sense—that of tempting to evil—God neither is tempted himself, nor tempts any one. Men are far more likely, in our times, to allege that their temptations are irresistible, and spring from the devil—not from God.

But having uttered caution and given instruction on the other side of the origin of temptation as divine, the apostle declares that every man is tempted, if at all, “when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” Temptations, for the most part, spring from a man’s passions. Men’s emotions or feelings furnish the impulse or desire upon which temptation plays. A pulseless man, a soulless man, a man without desires, could scarcely be tempted.

There are what may be called, perhaps, intellectual desires or tastes ; but for the most part they are feeble, comparatively colorless. The great bulk of human life springs from the appetites and the passions, from the desires and the affections ; and to these the appeal is made, whether for good or for bad. We persuade men, and we dissuade men, upon the appropriate use of these great motives and elements that are in them.

What, then, is *temptation*, in its simplest idea ? It is the presenting of inducements to men to act right or wrong. The language, "We tempt to right," has gone out of use. We *persuade* to right ; we *tempt* to evil.

When, then, inducements are presented to men to evil courses—to evil thoughts, to evil feelings, and to evil acts—there is simply the presentation of motives to them ; there is persuasion ; there is never coercion. Men are never tempted by superior powers in such a way that they cannot resist. They are enticed and weakened by a presence exterior to themselves, and they are swept away by it. Men are tempted in their own desires, passions, appetites, lusts, as they are called. Men are tempted when they are drawn away of their own selves, in the form of strong desire, appetite, passion or lust. So that temptation, to all intents and purposes, is self-inflicted or self-entertained. Its strength, its power, its center, lies in the man's own self. What he is, will determine how he will be tempted. How strong he is in the temptable points, will determine very largely the strength of the temptation itself.

The force of temptation will depend, not altogether on the strength of the desire, the appetite, or the passion which the man has in himself ; it will depend, also, in part, upon the quality and adaptation of the motive or persuasion. Consider each of these.

It is not possible to tempt any person except through some desire in that person. If there were no desires in men, how could you reach them ? In what way could you persuade them ? When we attempt to persuade men in a bargain, in social affairs, in civic or political matters, in pleasure, in the ten thousand combinations of life in which men live ; when it is our desire to draw them this way or that way, how invariably do we touch this or that spring ! We instinctively know what are the motives to present to men, and what are the motives on which they act most readily. Some men are thoughtful, sober, conscientious, cold ; and we should never think of reaching them through love and sympathy and geniality. In attempting to address them, we should approach them through some of the steady, sober faculties, knowing the avenues through which they are accessible ; knowing what are the great fundamental

instincts in them which will respond to our touch. We attempt to influence every person by the known nature of that person.

Right over against these are persons who are genial, sympathetic and kind; and we know that we should touch them through kindness and sympathy and geniality. Humor and mirth is the avenue through which to reach the confidence and receptivity of some persons; and so we approach them according to the way in which we know their mind acts. If a man be accessible through praise, we touch his love of praise when we attempt to influence him. If a man be very proud, we approach him in such a way that his self-respect will be gratified, so that he will be at peace with himself, and therefore at peace with us. We approach every man according to the appetite or passion or quality through which he is most accessible, if we would persuade men.

Under such circumstances, men study each other, in order to touch the appetites, the passions, the desires, the living forces which are in them, just as a musician touches the keys of the instrument before him, knowing that in touching each key he strikes the chord which lies back of it. We play upon each other insensibly. It is a matter almost of unconsciousness; but every man who has been in the world, and knows much about it, has become familiar with the fact that men are constantly influencing and managing each other more or less by appealing to some feeling or emotion.

If we do this wisely, and for each other's benefit, as well as for our own pleasure, there is no harm in it; but if we do it selfishly, it is sinful. One of the great sins of this life is the playing upon the feelings of our fellow-men for selfish purposes.

Now, if the desire in men is strong and active, temptation fastens upon it all the easier. Whether that temptation spring from visible or invisible sources; whether it be from human or demoniac influences, it is substantially the same in tendency; and the strength of it lies, primarily, in the strength of the feeling to which you address it.

For instance, a man who is constitutionally without large self-esteem—and there are a great many such—will never be tempted through pride. He has not the string to touch; or, if he has, it responds so feebly that it is hardly worth while to touch it.

No man will ever be tempted to vanity who has not large approbation. If, however, a man have large approbation, he certainly will be tempted in the direction of vanity. There are ten thousand influences streaming in upon him from every side; and if he have an appetite in him which hungers for praise, or for appreciation, you may be sure that he will be tried, and that that feeling in him

will be approached. And the force of the persuasion to which a man is subjected is in the ratio of the strength of the passion or the desire which is appealed to.

No man will be tempted to cowardice unless he is beforehand cautious and timid. A man who is without fear is never tempted to cowardice. Where a man is addicted to fear, he will, if a given kind of circumstance arise, be tempted to cowardliness of thought and feeling, and cowardliness of action.

A man that is generous and benevolent, and does not greatly desire property, is never tempted to avarice, because the feeling through which avarice is brought to bear is wanting. If, on the other hand, men have a strong desire for property ; if they love it, not for what it can do, but for the sake of the thing itself ; if the instinct of property be strong in them, then they are with great facility tempted to avarice.

A man who is constitutionally mild and gentle is very seldom tempted to anger or to cruelty. It is almost impossible to bring him up to the necessary degree of injured feeling, even when aggravating circumstances exist. But if a man be by nature quick to feel resentment, if he be largely endowed with combativeness and destructiveness, he will certainly be tempted along the line of these strong feelings.

So, then, the strength of your temptation lies in the strength of the inherent desires and appetites which you have. When you are tempted, it is you that tempt yourself. The enticement comes from without, but the power is generated in you ; it belongs to you ; it is a part of you. Under all circumstances it is normal and natural. Temptation is to be removed from the sphere of mysticism. It is to be taken out of the realm of sorcery.

If a man is tempted to lie, it is because conscience is small in him. It is because that passion for the gratification of which he lies, is large. If men tempt each other, they know each other ; and they touch that which is temptable, that which is easy to reach, in each other.

No man, then, would tempt a benevolent man, or a merciful man, except through his benevolence, or his mercifulness. No man would ever tempt an over-sympathetic man except through his sympathetic nature. Men sin from temptation on the side of undue sympathy and kindness and leniency ; and they sin in the opposite direction in precisely the same way.

The grand response to temptation, therefore, is normal, natural, constitutional. It is the response of your nature to the motive that is addressed to you.

It is very true that there is an additional and secondary element constituting the strength of temptation—namely, the motive itself. I have said that the prime qualification attaching to the strength of temptation is the strength of the desire to which it is applied ; but the amount of motive which you apply to that desire or passion also enters into the composition, and is to be considered.

If, for instance, a man be tempted with money, the desire is strong, and the temptation may be supposed to be strong ; but if the sum by which he is tempted be small, the temptation will be comparatively feeble. It will be like a child's finger on an organ-key, which the child cannot push down hard enough to make a great deal of sound. But if there be large temptation ; for instance, if an avaricious man have the prospect of great gains, the magnitude of the gains, and the continuity of them, fire, to an intense sensibility, the passion, the desire for gain. So that the accumulation of motives, it is said, determines, in part, the strength of the temptation ; and the feeling upon which they play also determines in part the strength of the temptation, in any case. This is true of a whole range of faculties.

When, therefore, men are thrown into exigencies in life, where the pressure of motive is very strong, it is true that there are elements outside of them which have much to do with the probabilities of their fall or their resistance.

If you were to put a blind man into a gallery of pictures, there would not be the slightest danger that he would ever be tempted by those pictures. He might live there a month or a year, and he would not covet them. But put an artist there ; and if there is a single picture that he admires, and he sees how by practicing some chicanery, or by taking some advantage, he can become the possessor of that picture at far less than its real value, he is tempted somewhat. But if there are two, or three, or four pictures, by some celebrated modern artist, the temptation is much greater ; and if they are by some *old* master, it is even greater still. The degree of the temptation is according to the desirableness of the exterior objects which are presented to the eye, according to the outward inducement, as well as according to the strength of the excitable feeling in the artist.

In Cincinnati, not a great while ago, a candidate for the Christian ministry was arrested for stealing books out of the public library. They were found at his home. He took them on principle. It was necessary that he should preach the Gospel ; he could not preach unless he could study ; he could not study because he

had not the means to buy books ; and so he stole them ! He wanted to serve the Lord and his fellow-men as a preacher ; he could not do this without knowledge ; he could not obtain the requisite knowledge without books ; so, going into the library and seeing a goodly array of books (for one of the noblest libraries in the United States is the public library in Cincinnati), he was tempted to steal some of them ; and he took them as he wanted them, and carried them home. And oh ! how easy a book can be stolen ! I never stole one ; but I have had a great many stolen from me.

Now, exterior conditions have a great deal to do with this act. Those books would have been no temptation to that man if he had not been of an intellectual or literary turn of mind. An ignorant, unambitious man would never be tempted to steal a book. A coarse, rough working-man might be tempted to steal a sausage or a cup of beer, but not a book. A scholar might be tempted to steal a book ; a man of artistic taste might be tempted to steal an engraving or a painting, or some little work of art—and often is ; so often that it is not safe to have objects of this sort in your house. A great many honest folks steal. A great many people in good society steal. A great many persons who are accomplished steal. A great many men who are agreeable, and who in the main are upright, steal. They are men that would not rob a bank ; they are men that would not join a company of burglars, or anything like that ; but they are men who, if they saw on somebody's mantelpiece a snuff-box which was made out of a mulberry tree that Shakespeare planted in his garden, might take it up, and might be tempted to forget where they put it when they laid it down ; and therefore it might be found in their cabinet, and not in the other man's. Men are tempted to steal from taste, and from curiosity. It is one of those points that I feel incompetent to analyze—the sensation which people have when they steal ; but one thing I know, and that is, that the strength of the passion or desire for property—for works of art, or books, or what not—joined to the desire of the thing, constitute the great power of temptation in any case. These are the two co-operating forces on which the degree of temptation depends.

Other things may come up incidentally to intensify the power of the temptation. The imagination often clothes objects with a false light. Where the imagination acts with the reason, it gives luminousness and beauty to thought. Where the imagination acts with the moral sentiments, it gives glow and attractiveness to holiness, to righteousness, to manliness. Where the imagination acts with the affections, it makes all things blossom to the eye of love. Where

the imagination hovers around the appetites and the passions, it gives to them, also, beauty and attractiveness, and within particular bounds enriches them, refines them, adorns them. But where the passions and appetites are acting under circumstances that tend to degrade, the imagination is a great quickener, and is one of the most dangerous of all influences. If a man is addicted to drink, and thinks about it, and brings up, in his imagination, the foaming tankard, or the scenes of conviviality that he has been through, or that he might go through; if in his imagination he calls for sparkling Burgundy, or for champagne; if in his imagination he grows thirsty, and thinks how good this or that kind of liquor would taste; if in his imagination he sits at the table, and has some generous fellows to treat him; if he thinks it over at night, and in the morning, and all day, and keeps it in his mind continually, though he has joined the temperance society, and though he says he is not going to drink any more, when he comes to any place where drink is kept he is all prepared to yield to temptation and gratify his desire. His imagination has got him ready, so that when the outward inducement appeals to the inward desire, he falls. If he had thought of cold water all day he would not have been tempted to drink; it would have cooled him off, so that when the temptation had been presented to him he would have had power to resist it. There are a great many temptations which befall men almost wholly through the insidious preparation, the inflammation wrought in them by the illicit and abnormal action of the imagination.

So, too, the amount of moral resistance which there is in the direction of any public sentiment will have much influence in determining the power of temptation. If the sentiment of conscience is very lax in the community, if the manners and customs are loose and low-toned, men will be far more easily biased and tempted than they would be if they were upheld by a stringent public sentiment.

Likewise, hope and fear in men will have an important relation to the power of temptation. There are very many men who feel the pressure of desire and temptation, but who are cautious and calculating. Take a person who is radiant and enthusiastic and imaginative; in other words, take a person who has just the qualities which go to make him a pleasant companion; take a person who is buoyant, and cheerful, and agreeable, and genial, and frank; take a person who is full of hope and expectation,—and he acts spontaneously. He talks without stopping to think exactly what he is going to say. He breaks out into action here and there. And as long as he is restrained by relations and circumstances so that he commits

no impropriety, it is beautiful ; but throw such a person out into life unguarded by any caution and unrestrained by any secretiveness working with conscience, and let him act spontaneously, without calculation, without pausing to inquire what may happen, and, when strong pressure is brought suddenly to bear upon him, he gives way. He is instantly carried away by influences which a more cautious man would avoid by calculation. Such men are destroyed especially by social intercourse, and by dissipations. I think it would be found, on investigation, that ninety-five per cent. of all the men who go down under temptation to an unlawful death, are men who were by nature generous, incautious, frank, genial, kindly ; and that when temptations sprang upon them they were not held back by fear or calculation. If they had only been cold, if they had only been selfish, if they had only been hard, they would not have been caught so easily. Oh ! it is a pity that the things which are so sweet and good turn so quick to acid. And yet, if you look, you will see that it is the ripest and fairest peach on the whole tree that is bored by the wasp, and has its juice sucked out. There are no such pomologists as insects are. They know the best fruit. And when temptations fly through the community, they often take the best fruits that hang upon the bough of the household—the sweet-hearted, the sympathetic, the impulsive, the beauteous ; and when temptation has shaken the tree, if there is any fruit that is not shaken off from the bough, it is the little knurly, sour, worthless crab, that is not ripe, and that is not likely to get ripe. The men that are not overthrown by temptation are often those that are censorious. They are often the critics of those that do fall. They are hard men ; they are men that are cold, and that it gives one the chills to shake hands with. They are men that never feel the swell or reverberation of passions in themselves. They are men that go rock-ribbed and stony-hearted along through life, and talk about those who give way to their feelings and go to destruction. They never give way to *their* feelings—that is sure !

Then, again, there is a social bias ; the influence of those who are around men in the hour of pressure. There are times when the inducements which are brought to bear by companions determine very largely the stress and strength of temptation. Where persons stand alone in their own conscience, opposed to any wrong custom, they often have power to resist temptation ; but when the influence is exerted upon them of one, of two, of five, of ten, of a score of companions, a state of feeling is frequently produced in them through which they feel what they would not have felt if they had been alone. Men usually go in phalanxes. They

move together in companies ; and many persons are swayed who would have stood straight if they had been left merely to the influences which belonged to their proper nature.

If these general statements are true, I may say, first, that the kind of temptations which men suffer is very likely to describe pretty accurately the way in which they themselves are made up. If you find out what your temptations are, you will find out very largely what you are yourself. The directions in which you find yourself moving, and the dangers which you foresee—these are indications of the strength of the various passions and appetites and desires and affections that are within you, and will lead to a certain degree of self-knowledge. According to the declaration of the apostle, “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust.” See which way you are drawn, if you would know what your perils are.

Secondly, no temptation is either a spell or a paralysis upon your power ; nor is it in any sense a spiritual coercion. Many suppose that Satan has the power to cast a glamour upon men. Animals are able to produce such an effect upon their victims, beyond a question. A cat will, it is said, charm a bird. It certainly has the power, by near approach, either to terrify, or in some way to control, the bird, so that it will sit still, distressed and fluttering, and let its insidious foe creep up and destroy it. I have delivered not a few birds that have been wrought upon thus. And it is thought that Satan has the power of throwing his spirit upon men in the same way. Men think that they are being tempted of the devil. Far be it from me to say that there is no temptation that issues from the inner sphere of bad spirits ; far be it from me to say that there are no arrows which come from other battle-fields than those on which we are acting here ; but I will say that there is no more power in Satan than there is in man to tempt you. The strength of temptation lies in the strength of the evil-doing faculty which is in you. If the temptation be some sinister, malign spiritual influence from without, it is no stronger because it came from Satan than it would have been if it had come from your next-door neighbor. It does not come with any more power of control. It may be a little more skillfully employed than most men employ temptation ; but it is not necessarily any more to be dreaded. I wish to disabuse your imagination and your understanding of the impression that temptations are irresistible because they proceed from cunning demoniac spirits. I desire that you should perceive that their power is regulated by the strength of the passion that is in you, and that it comes largely from the inducement presented

through your understanding to that passion. The strength of the temptation lies in the magnitude of the inducement, and in the intensity of the desire to which the inducement is presented. And whether it comes from spirits or from embodied men, you are master of yourself. You are a free responsible agent, competent to consider and to determine for yourself what is right and what is wrong. And if you are heedless, if you care not, and run eagerly into evil, it is you that fall, and not Satan that pushes you over. You are destroyed by your own act—by the purposed activity of your faculties. The blame may be distributive, but your portion of it will be none the less.

If I strike a dagger home, and slay a man, I am a murderer, though I am incited to the deed by the various appliances of some cunning Iago behind me. He may be guilty as well as I; but there is no such thing as distributing guilt among the different persons engaged in a crime, so as to give a tenth to one, a tenth to another, and so on. The entire guilt is charged against each, as though there were but one.

The obvious shield or defense against temptation lies in such an ordering of a man's own nature, in the establishing within himself of such habits, in such a pre-eminence of that which is good, and such a subordination of that which is liable to evil, that when temptations come they cannot throw him from his position.

Here is a man that is irascible; that is accustomed to give way under the least provocation; that breaks out when he is irritated into railing, or bitter imprecation, or cruel action: but if he has laid the bridle upon his tongue beforehand; if he has disciplined his unruly temper; if he has brought it into subjection to his conscience, and his sense of what is becoming in manliness, and, above all, to the law of kindness,—then when inducements come, although the fire is there, the spark does not break out, and still less the flame. A regulated life, a daily and hourly preparation by the right ordering of a man's life, is a grand remedy for temptation.

There is no grace vouchsafed to those who expose themselves needlessly to temptation under circumstances where experience has shown that they are in danger. If men know where they are liable to fall, and if they have been tempted, and have fallen, woe be to them if they put themselves under the same fire again. He is foolish who would rush across the field of battle where whole batteries swept the entire space, if he could go by another and safer way; and when men, knowing that inducements will assail their strong desires, and that they are vincible, still venture, it cannot be said that they are tempted. It should rather be said that they tempt the devil to tempt them.

A man is trying to reform from intemperance, and knows that he should remain at home, or should seek some brotherhood which is in sympathy with him, in order that he may be able to maintain himself. He does mean to maintain himself ; but he is imprudent. He starts from home, and says to himself, " Well, I don't mean to go to the club to-night ; I am going down to the conference-meeting : I promised my wife that I would, and I will. He takes the car, and when he reaches the junction of Court and Fulton streets he finds himself getting out. He says, " Well, I ain't going in ; but I will just go down that way to see how it looks ; " and all the time he has a double-nature in him. There is a little hypocrite coiled up inside of him, that says, " I do not mean to let him know what he is going to do. " It tries to make him believe that he is not going to stop, but is going to the conference-meeting, as he told his wife he would ; but he knows all the time that he is going to stop. He has fallen before ; and yet when he comes to the point where he knows it is not safe for him to get off, he gets off. And though he keeps saying to himself, " I am not going in, " he does go in. When he gets there, the man, of all others that he ought not to meet, the very man who has the worst influence over him, says, " Hello ! " and takes him by both hands, and says, " I was just wishing that I could see you : I do not know why you happened to come into my thoughts ; " and puts his hand on his shoulder, and says, " Come in. " " Oh, no ; I am going to meeting. " " No, you're not going to meeting—not to-night, any how. There is a meeting in here "—and he goes in. And when he goes home, he is helped home. And the next morning there is that doleful headache, that doleful remorse, that doleful self-reproach ; and he says, " What a fool I was to go that way ! I might have known. " He did know. After that he stays at home, and does not go out for two or three days. Then he thinks he will go to the conference meeting again ; and on his way down he gets off at the same point, and goes right to the same place. He does this again and again and again, knowing all the time the liability of his weakness, and the certainty that he will fall.

Now, I say that man seeks temptation—not temptation seeks him. There are temptations that search men out ; there are companions that run after their companions ; but there are many men who go steadily downward, feeling the force of gravity in themselves, and seeking out the instruments by which they are destroyed. There is no grace for such men, though there is a warning for them. Their experience is a trumpet-tongued warning. Their downfall is a providence of God, that should lead them to

wisdom and resistance ; but if they set it at naught, and still go on knowing where they are liable to be attacked, and courting attack, there is no grace that can save them. No grace can save any man unless he helps himself. If a man fall, he falls of his own power ; and if he get up, his own power is to be exerted in his getting up. He may have some help outside of himself ; but no outside help can relieve the absolutely helpless. It is the help of others that increases your strength, and renders you equal to emergencies. Self-care and wise prevision are indispensable to one's safety. A right knowledge, by experience, of your liabilities and your dangers ; a knowledge of places, and people, and circumstances, and times, and seasons—this is necessary if a man has gone wrong, and wishes to recover himself. A man must take heed how he does wrong, and how he has been accustomed to do wrong.

Wherefore, it is all foolishness for men to set guards over themselves where they do not need any guards, and leave broad and wide open the door where they know the attack is going to be made, and has been made a hundred times before.

Many men are very watchful against temptation on sides where they are in no danger of being tempted. Here is a man who never says ten words in a day ; he is silent and thoughtful : and he tells you that he keeps a guard over his mouth ; that he is determined not to sin by talking. But it is not by talking that he is apt to sin ; he is not in danger on that side ; and yet there is the watchman going up and down in front of that door, which does not open more than once or twice a day anyhow. Here is an ugly devil of suspicion and envy and jealousy that has possession of him, and causes him to sin ; but there is no guard over that. It is where these passions reside that his temptations come ; but he has no watchman there. He makes up for neglecting the points where the danger is, by putting all his forces at the points where there is perfect security !

Here is a man that says, "I guard myself against stinginess." Bless his dear soul ! he never had a feeling of stinginess in all his life. His trouble has always been looseness. He never could keep anything.

Here is a man who is a spendthrift, a scatterer, a ne'er-do-well, and he says, "I am determined that I will not be a miser." There is not the slightest danger of it, in his case.

But how is it with the man who *is* a miser ? He tells you that he has watched these spendthrifts through life, that he has never seen them come to any good, and that he early took warning from them, and determined that, whatever came, he would not be a squanderer, by over-benevolence, of what God gave him—and he never

has been. He watches himself continually for fear that he will give away something ; and his watch is greatly blessed !

So you shall find men watching against temptation where you could not tempt them anyhow ; and they are utterly careless of those points where they know, or might know, that they are temptable.

Is this wisdom ? Would it be wisdom in a military campaign ? Is not that the greatest battle of their lives which men are fighting for their manhood and for their immortality ? All around us are ten thousand customs, good or evil ; all around us are ten thousand influences of one kind or another, wholesome or unwholesome : and he that draws his inspiration and his hope from God ; he that walks with a perpetual sense, “*Thou, God, seest me ;*” he that dwells in such sympathy with the Lord Jesus Christ as to feel him a present help in time of trouble ; he that under God’s inspiration holds himself steadfast in the right, and all his appetites and passions and affections in subordination,—finds himself able to meet danger when it comes, and sees fulfilled in him that which is promised in the Word of God.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful. He will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear ; but he will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape.

Put on the whole armor of God, and in the day of battle have all that is needful for defense and for offense. Stand while the conflict rages ; and, after it has passed by, be found unpierced, still standing, your head protected, your heart guarded, your whole body shielded.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE come to thee, O Lord our God, neither doubting nor fearing, since thy words of promise have done away fear, and since the light of thy love has dispersed all doubt. Thou art our Father. Thy love toward thy creatures is greater than ours toward our children. Thou hast told us that if we, with all our evil and selfishness, know how to give good things to our children, much more dost thou, our Father in heaven, know how to give good things to us thy children. Thy love is perfected, and has a power which we know nothing of. Great is the realm of divine love. Wonderful is its creativeness. How far-reaching it is! How patient! How far beyond all human conception in gentleness and sympathy! How wondrous in its recovering work! How dost thou, by thy great affection, inspire others to love! How can we, with our most imperfect experiences, rise to the grandeur of the thought of that orb of love which thou art, and by which all the universe is sustained, and which is drawing toward it evermore, rank upon rank, in successive generations, those that are to become the children of light and glory? Though by searching we cannot find thee out unto perfection, yet we can find out enough of thee to rejoice our hearts, and encourage our aspirations, and inspire us when we are overburdened or shadowed by doubts and troubles. In thee is our strength. In thee is our hope and joy. And may we learn how to rejoice in the Lord.

We commend to thee thy servants. We commend to thee all who feel their need of thee. We pray that thou wilt open every heart in thy presence to-night, that each one may be able to lay bare his thought or desire before God. Search us, and try us, and see if there be any evil way in us. We pray that we may feel that God's faithfulness with us, though it bring pain, brings healing. May we rejoice in thy fidelity, knowing that a Father cannot willingly hurt his child, but only for its good! Thou hast been pleased to tell us that all thy chastisements of us are that we may become partakers of thy nature. Withhold not, then, thine hand. Grant this consummation; and may every one of thy people, from day to day, have indications of progress, and signs and tokens that they are inheriting more and more the Divine nature, and unfolding it into more gracious dispositions, into nobler purposes, into better fidelities, into purer affections, and into a life which is more like thy perpetual life.

Deliver, we beseech thee, any that are in trouble; or, if their troubles abide for their good, grant that thy Spirit, the Comforter, may find them, and dwell evermore with them. We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to all that are in despondency; to all that are in doubt or fear; to all that are under the burdens of life; to all that feel the pressure of care; to all that know not which way to turn. May they find in thee a present help, relief, strength to bear their trouble, guidance out of it, light in darkness, joy in sorrow, and songs in the night.

Bless, we pray thee, all the households of this congregation. May peace dwell in every one of them. We pray that the fruits of righteousness may abound throughout the earth in all their loveliness. Grant that we may look not upon our own things only: may we have a kindly sympathy for one another, bearing each other's burdens, winning each other, and in all things fulfilling the law of love.

Grant thy blessing, we pray thee, to rest upon those who are not thy disciples; who have never named the name of Christ; who are without his Spirit; who are living in the world worldly, selfish, proud, envious, jealous, full of all self-indulgence. Will the Lord have compassion upon them. May they see the fault and the danger of their career. May they be arrested

and brought to thoughtfulness, and to a manly purpose; and, by faith in Jesus Christ, may they rise to the true dignity of their manhood here, that they may inherit their nobler selves in the life that is to come.

We pray that thou wilt bless the young—those that are in the midst of perils; those for whose feet snares are set. May they be rescued. May they grow strong under temptation, and be able to defend themselves, and to gain victories, that they may become good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We commend ourselves to thy paternal care in all the circumstances of our lives. Appoint our paths and our experiences. Bring us when and where thou wilt to the end of this life. Then, wherever death may find us, as we look upon the experiences through which we have passed on earth, may our vision be opened, and may we see that death is but the coming of the Son of Man. Then, lifted by power from on high up to where thou art, and into thy presence, may we rejoice with exceeding great joy.

And to thy name shall be the praise, forever and ever. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt let thy blessing rest upon the word spoken, and grant that it may do good to all that are present. May it quicken the watchfulness of those who are in peril. Grant, if there be those who are surrounded by the sweet influences of home, and the blessed associations of Christian friends and relations, and who find little to tempt them, that they may be the succorers of those who are tempted. May those who go forth in perilous ways, and in the midst of dangers, be so trained in truth, and justice, and purity, that they shall pass through these perilous ways unharmed. Deliver us all, in the day of our strength, from the perils that are incident to every-day life. May we search ourselves to know where we are liable to fall, and what is the point at which we continually break down. Search thou us. Give us the illuminating influences of the divine Spirit; and grant that thus we may go on safely, day by day, trusting in God, until, at last, we are brought into thy presence, where we shall sin no more, and be tempted no more, and where we shall be as the angels of God. And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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